Second Peter
Scripture: 2 Peter
Code: MSB61

Title

The clear claim to authorship in 1:1 by the Apostle Peter gives the epistle its title. To distinguish it from Peter's first epistle, it was given the Greek title "*Petrou B,*" or 2 Peter.

Author and Date

The author of 2 Peter is the Apostle Peter (see Introduction to 1 Peter). In 1:1, he makes that claim; in 3:1, he refers to his first letter; in 1:14, he refers to the Lord's prediction of his death (John 21:18,19); and in 1:16–18, he claims to have been at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–4). However, critics have generated more controversy over 2 Peter's authorship and rightful place in the canon of Scripture than over any other NT book. The church fathers were slow in giving it their acceptance. No church father refers to 2 Peter by name until Origen near the beginning of the third century. The ancient church historian, Eusebius, only included 2 Peter in his list of disputed books, along with James, Jude, 2 John, and 3 John. Even the leading Reformers only hesitatingly accepted it.

The question about differences in Greek style between the two letters has been satisfactorily answered. Peter wrote that he used an amanuensis, Silvanus, in 1 Peter (cf. 1 Pet. 5:12). In 2 Peter, Peter either used a different amanuensis or wrote the letter by himself. The differences in vocabulary between the two letters can be explained by the differences in themes. First Peter was written to help suffering Christians. Second Peter was written to expose false teachers. On the other hand, there are remarkable similarities in the vocabulary of the two books. The salutation, "grace to you and peace be multiplied," is essentially the same in each book. The author uses such words as "precious," "virtue," "putting off," and "eyewitness," to name just a few examples, in both letters. Certain rather unusual words found in 2 Peter are also found in Peter's speeches in the Acts of the Apostles. These include "obtained" (1:2; Acts 1:17); "godliness" (1:3,6,7; 3:11; Acts 3:12); and "wages of iniquity" (2:13,15; Acts 1:18). Both letters also refer to the same OT event (2:5; 1 Pet. 3:18–20). Some scholars have pointed out that there are as many similarities in vocabulary between 1 and 2 Peter as there are between 1 Timothy and Titus, two letters almost universally believed to have been written by Paul.

The differences in themes also explains certain emphases, such as why one letter teaches that the second coming is near, and one deals with its delay. First Peter, ministering especially to suffering Christians, focuses on the imminency of Christ as a means of encouraging the Christians. Second Peter, dealing with scoffers, emphasizes the reasons why that imminent return of Christ has not yet occurred. Other proposed differences invented by the critics, such as the contradiction between including the resurrection of Christ in one letter and the Transfiguration of Christ in the other, seem to be contrived.

Moreover, it is seemingly irrational that a false teacher would spuriously write a letter against false teachers. No unusual, new, or false doctrines appear in 2 Peter. So, if 2 Peter were a forgery, it would be a forgery written by a fool for no reason at all. This is too much to believe. The conclusion to the question of authorship is that, when the writer introduced the letter and referred to himself as Peter, he was writing the truth.

Nero died in a.d. 68, and tradition says Peter died in Nero's persecution. The epistle may have been written just before his death (1:14; ca. a.d. 67–68).

Background and Setting

Since the time of the writing and sending his first letter, Peter had become increasingly concerned about false teachers who were infiltrating the churches in Asia Minor. Though these false teachers had already caused trouble, Peter expected that their heretical doctrines and immoral life-styles would result in more damage in the future. Thus Peter, in an almost last will and testament (1:13–15), wrote to warn the beloved believers in Christ about the doctrinal dangers they were facing.

Peter does not explicitly say where he was when he wrote this letter, as he does in 1 Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). But the consensus seems to be that Peter wrote this letter from prison in Rome, where he was facing imminent death. Shortly after this letter was written, Peter was martyred, according to reliable tradition, by being crucified upside down (*see note on John 21:18*).

Peter says nothing in the salutation about the recipients of this letter. But according to 3:2, Peter was writing another epistle to the same people to whom he wrote 1 Peter. In his first letter, he spelled out that he was writing "to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). These provinces were located in an area of Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were mostly Gentiles (*see note on 1:1*).

Historical and Theological Themes

Second Peter was written for the purpose of exposing, thwarting, and defeating the invasion of false teachers into the church. Peter intended to instruct Christians in how to defend themselves against these false teachers and their deceptive lies. This book is the most graphic and penetrating exposé of false teachers in Scripture, comparable only to Jude.

The description of the false teachers is somewhat generic. Peter does not identify some specific false religion, cult, or system of teaching. In a general characterization of false teachers, he informs that they teach destructive heresies. They deny Christ and twist the Scriptures. They bring true faith into disrepute. And they mock the second coming of Christ. But Peter was just as concerned to show the immoral character of these teachers as he was to expose their teaching. Thus, he describes them in more detail than he describes their doctrines. Wickedness is not the product of sound doctrine, but of "destructive heresies" (2:1).

Other themes for this letter can be discerned in the midst of Peter's polemic against the false teachers. He wanted to motivate his readers to continue to develop their Christian character (1:5–11). In so doing, he explains wonderfully how a believer can have assurance of his salvation. Peter also wanted to persuade his readers of the divine character of the apostolic writings (1:12–21). Near the end of the letter, he presents reasons for the delay in Christ's second coming (3:1–13).

Another recurring theme is the importance of knowledge. The word, "knowledge," appears in some form 16 times in these 3 short chapters. It is not too much to say that Peter's primary solution to false teaching is knowledge of true doctrine. Other distinctive features of 2 Peter include a precise statement on the divine origin of Scripture (1:20,21); the future destruction of the world by fire (3:8–13); and the recognition of Paul's letters as inspired Scripture (3:15,16).

Interpretive Challenges

Perhaps the most important challenge in the epistle is to rightly interpret 1:19–21, because of its far-reaching implications with regard to the nature and authenticity of Scripture. That passage, along with 2 Tim. 3:15–17, is vital to a sound view of the Bible's inspiration. Peter's remark that the Lord "bought" false teachers (2:1) poses a challenge interpretively and theologically with regard to the nature of the atonement. The identity of the angels who sinned (2:4) also challenges the interpreter. Many who believe that the saved can be lost again, use 2:18–22 for their argument. That passage, directed at false teachers, must be clarified so as not to contradict a similar statement to believers in 1:4. Further, whom does God not want to perish (3:9)? All of these matters will be treated in the notes.

Outline

Salutation (1:1, 2)

I. Know Your Salvation (1:3–11)

A. Sustained by God's Power (1:3, 4)

B. Confirmed by Christian Graces (1:5–7)

C. Honored by Abundant Reward (1:8–11)

II. Know Your Scriptures (1:12–21)

A. Certified by Apostolic Witness (1:12–18)

B. Inspired by the Holy Spirit (1:19–21)

III. Know Your Adversaries (2:1–22)

A. Deceptive in Their Infiltration (2:1–3)

B. Doomed by Their Iniquity (2:4–10a)

C. Disdainful in Their Impurity (2:10b-17)

D. Devastating in Their Impact (2:18–22)

IV. Know Your Prophecy (3:1–18)

A. The Sureness of the Day of the Lord (3:1–10)

B. The Sanctification of God's People (3:11-18)

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